

Glendale News Press

Fewer smokes for teens

More Glendale shops are refusing to sell tobacco to youth, study finds.

By Max Zimbert, max.zimbert@latimes.com

July 16, 2010

GLENDALE — Fewer tobacco retailers are selling to teenagers, according to the latest study released Tuesday — a reflection of tighter controls on vendors and public smoking, officials said.

In the Youth Purchase Survey conducted by Glendale Adventist Medical Center, teenage volunteers were enlisted to try to purchase cigarettes from 100 Glendale stores in a sting-like operation. Of those merchants, 10% sold to minors, down from 24% during the last survey in 2006.

"We found a very different tobacco retailer environment," said Guadulesa Rivera, the tobacco control program coordinator at Glendale Adventist. "Youth ... you can't sell them cigarettes, and that's the environment that's changing."

Hospital staff observed every attempted transaction, and Rivera said there were multiple instances of merchants lecturing the teenage customer on the dangers of smoking at a young age.

"We heard this many times, and this was so different from what we experienced four years ago," she said.

In 2006, there was no Fresh Air ordinance, the anti-smoking ban that forbids smoking on city property, outdoor dining areas and most publicly accessible areas. And beginning in January 2008, retailers had to obtain a tobacco retail license from city regulators, which is another incentive to obey the law, Rivera said.

"People realize this is a new age and it's not OK to smoke and especially not OK for youth to smoke," she said.

That's a message the nonprofit Glendale Healthy Kids tries to instill in its oral health and asthma discussions for parents, especially families with young children, executive director Camille Levee said.

"I think the community is beginning to become a little more aware," she said. "Whether the parents smoke themselves, I can't say, but I do know that parents are understanding that this is not good for the kids in any way, shape, or form."

Despite the progress, a significant number of Glendale residents continue to smoke, according to a Los Angeles County Department of Public Health report released last month.

More than 15% of residents smoke, despite being a city that has earned praise from the American Lung Assn. for being a leader in local tobacco control legislation, according to the county report.

The youth purchase survey was conducted through May and June, Rivera said. Participants entered retailers with an adult present and tried to buy cigarettes. In many cases, merchants denied them because they were without identification with a photograph and date of birth, she said.

The data will be shared with the county Department of Public Health, which maintains a tobacco control policy database, Rivera said.

"It helps them share information not only with all of us working in tobacco control, but also in the state and federal level," she said. "Everyone looks at Southern California very carefully, and the city of Glendale has an excellent reputation."